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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Well, it's been five years since the 9/11 attacks in this country. This anniversary was marked with numerous looks back at the fateful events of that late summer day. The sights and sounds from that day still bring out a lot of emotions. It's too bad that these events were partially used as a focal point for political posturing. You'd think that, for a few days at least, politics could take a back seat during such a commemorative event.

To add insult to injury, it hasn't been such a great week around here, at least with regard to the weather. It's cooler than normal for this time of year. While I enjoy cooler temperatures, it happened much too quickly! I didn't get much done this week, but managed to get closer to completing some of my projects. We're also still waiting on the status of our new door. Now it appears that our order information is missing, so I may have to return to rectify that situation! So, the rest of my work in that area is on hold for the moment.

But, even with the cool and rainy week, I managed to pick one fairly decent day to get in a round of golf! Get them in while I still can. Well, it continues to be dreary around here, so I'd better close before I really start to depress myself!

Until next time...

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Quake Game

Hi,

If you read at <http://www.dhs.nu/> you will catch the following news :

Source : Dead Hackers Society

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Falcon060 Quake released by Mystic Bytes September 7, 2006

MiKRO of Mystic Bytes has released a new Falcon060 port of the classic PC game Quake by ID Software.

The port is especially made for the Falcon, so it’s unlikely to work on clones or Aranym.

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One thing I’ve done, is to take <http://eureka.atari.org/MacAranym.zip> I deactivated fVDI, to be in a Falcon 256 colors compatible graphic mode (the TSR is in the AUTO folder), and booted with TOS4.04 rather than EmuTOS.

To get a ’.pak’ suitable for Quake I then downloaded the shareware

<ftp://ftp.idsoftware.com/idstuff/quake/quake106.zip>

and placed the unarchived ’ID1’ folder at the same level as the .TTP.

Then I had to launch the Quake 1.06 binary, and all worked fine including Quake’s sound. The JITc is not activated in MacAranym, so no problem. But you may have to deactivate it in the requisite case.

Then, let’s enjoy this addictive game ;)

Best Atarian regards,

-- Francois LE COAT
Author of Eureka 2.12 (2D Graph Describer, 3D Modeller)
http://eureka.atari.org

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Didja ever have one of those days when you just didn’t give a damn? You know the kind of day I mean... you walk through it just to get through it. There’s nothing life-changing or life-threatening going on, and whatever you do isn’t going to change the course of history one way or the other. Hell, I’m not even saying that it’s a bad thing... just the way things are sometimes. But, ya know? The one thing I looked forward to all day was coming home and writing this column.

Of course, once I got home I found that there were a dozen or so things that needed doing before I could sit down and ’get to work’. So those are now done, and I’m sitting comfortably after having decompressed for a while.

And what do I hear? "Honeeeee... the toilet isn’t working." Yeah, great. Just what I needed. Luckily, Home Depot and Lowe’s will be open for another couple of hours. I’ll have time enough to finish this up before it becomes critical in there.

Yeah, you're right. I'll go take care of it now and get it out of the way.

Well, it took a little longer than I thought, and it took an extra trip to the store, so I'm not going to snow you... this is going to be a short column. I know you understand.

So let's get to it, huh? Here's the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Francois LeCoat posts this about Quake:

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Then, let's enjoy this addictive game."

Lonny Pursell tells Francois:

"This is a peecee dos installer. Please explain to me how I run this on the mac to get the id1 folder?!"

Joakim Högberg asks Lonny:

"Doesn't a Quake version for Mac exist? IMO it sounds like quite a detour to go through the emulation route to get such a game running on

hardware that has native (and thus probably a lot faster) versions."

'MG' asks about Cubase and Pro24:

"I have had to dig out my 1040stf 4mb to load up my old Steinberg Pro24 prog so as to see how to best setup a more modern system on a less than modern IBM Thinkpad 760ED (133Mz, 104Mb, 5Mb hdd 2mb video ram) that actually has a dedicated Midi import, albeit needing the midi to serial cables.

In fact assuming that this wouldn't give me full Midi, I went and bought a Parallel Midi interface for a PC off eBay - a Midiman Portman, but the bugger needs a fully connected (25pins) Centronics cable and a standard printer cable won't do... B'locks!

So another thought was anyway to run Pro24 or Cbase under any of the PC ST emulators? The laptop runs either W95 or W98se depending which drive I insert...?

Really, I want to explore VST now and don't think thats possible on olde ST's !! Any thoughts/experiences anyone??"

'Atarian90' asks MG:

"Why would you want to? Cubase is available for Windows already, so why not just get that? It would probably perform better than an Cubase ST under emulation."

Daniel Mandic jumps in and adds:

"I have VST 3.7r2 for PC. Well, it's O.K. I have used it with Windows95.

But, the Timing on the Atari sounds better. (and a more stable computer operating environment, in short: it crashes fewer! For the technical part... the musical side is known and hearable)

(using an emulator to drive hardware via the PC is out of my imagination. Why should someone do that!? Better take the emulator (PC DOS/Win) itself."

'Charlie' adds:

"well i can assist you , i use these things almost daily ....i use cubase under emulation on a pc and on an atari st mega 4..
what is it you are trying to attempt ? it appears we need to transfer the old midi files from diskettes onto the new computer..... well coincidentally i program atari computers .. i make special program for formats too!! , just elaborate where your problem area is and i will help... i am also interested in whether or not you are going to part with the atari cubase and pro 24...sell trade donate...etc etc etc??????"

Paul Williamson adds his thoughts:

"Both those programmes use a software copy-protection dongle that plugs into the side of your ST. Where are you going to put that if you use an emulator ? Sadly this problem has never been addressed by the writers of emulators, and I don't expect there's anyway you will ever be able to do.

Some of the best Atari software needs these dongles, but the only answer is to use your Atari.

(Or persuade someone to make you a PCI card to plug the dongle into, and write the drivers for it....)"

Will van Dongen asks for help with his AfterBurner040:

"We are trying to build an afterburner040 and Nova graphic card into a Falcon. But we have troubles. The afterburner won't sync We have tried several clock patches but still the afterburner won't sync. A friend who does actually the "building" is in search of Douglas Little. In the past Douglas build several afterburners into falcon's and had his shire of trouble.

But we can't find Douglas Little on the Net every link is dead. So we try it this way. Please Help some desperate people And I want my Falcon back alive and kicking!"

Rodolphee Czuba tells Will:

"You don't need to find Doug Little...
I remember there was several good web pages on the net explaining how to do the good clock patch for AB40...
I'm sure you can find some info yet..."

Ronald Hall adds:

"You might want to get in touch with Jo Skarstein. If I remember correctly, he had a lot of experience with AB040s."

Claude Bourgoin tells us that he...

"Just purchased a riebl ethernet card on ebay. I would like to know what I need to do to connect it to my network hub, which has only RJ45 connections and also what I need to do to get it to run under mint and/or TOS 3.6."

Lonny Pursell tells Claude:

"There seems to be one for freemint:

http://sparemint.atariforge.net/cgi-bin/cvsweb/freemint/sys/sockets/xif/

See file LANCE.txt, however you may have to compile it yourself."

Mark Goossens tells Lonny:

"You need a hub with BNC and RJ45 connectors. But it is a whole thing to get a proper connection. You need at least two BNC-Y-plugs, one BNC cable and 2 BNC terminators.
(I'm still searching for the cable - I found connectors and terminators on ebay).

Sting 1.20 works fine with rieblcard. (I can ping to myself).
Don't use sting 1.26. It bombs me always away. You can test your card also with ANS (atari network services)."

Michael Schwingen adds:

"Hm - readily assembled RG58 cable (50 ohms) with BNC connectors should be available at most electronic shops (if in Germany: try Reichelt if your local shop can't help). For a short distance (say 2-3m), RG59 (video, 75 ohm) or RG62 (Arcnet, 93 Ohm IIRC) cable should work, too. RG174 (thinner, 50 ohms) works fine for 10Base2 ethernet up to some 10m."

Claude tells Michael:

"I have the RG58 cable, but my hub does not have a BNC connector."

David Wade adds:

"A short video cable with BNC will work fine."

Uwe Seimet adds his thoughts:

"You need a switch that has both RJ45 and BNC connectors. I got such a switch for 1 euro at Ebay and use it to connect my TT to my DSL router. As far as software for the Riebel card is concerned I think there is a solution for MiNT, but I am not sure. There is also a commercial software package for TOS, which is called ANS (or something like that), but it was not very stable and does not work with MagiC.

I only use the Riebel card when I am running Linux on my TT, and under Linux it works fine."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week (when I HOPEFULLY won't have to include any info about plumbing projects), same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Wii To Debut In November!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Neverwinter Nights 2!

Embracing Sequels!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Nintendo To Debut Console In November

Nintendo Co. Ltd. said on Thursday it will start selling its new video game console, the Wii, in the United States on November 19 for about $250, as it girds for a three-way holiday showdown with Microsoft and Sony.

The third-ranked console maker faces stiff competition in the $30 billion interactive game industry. Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox 360 has been available since November and Sony Corp.'s PlayStation 3 is slated for a November 17 North American release at two price levels: $500 and $600.

This is the first time Kyoto, Japan-based Nintendo will debut a console in the United States rather than at home. Wii, about the size of a hardcover book, will hit stores in Japan on December 2 in Japan and cost 25,000 yen ($212).

"We will make a profit on the entire Wii proposition out of the box - hardware and software," Nintendo America President Reggie Fils-Aime told Reuters in an interview in New York.

Nintendo, once the game industry leader and renowned for the "Donkey Kong," "Mario Brothers" and "Pokemon" game franchises, is hoping to recreate the more recent success of its Game Boy Advance and DS hand-held game machines.

The Wii features an innovative and intuitive one-hand controller, described by some as a magic wand. Nintendo also will offer a "nunchuk," which plugs into the controller and enables two-handed play.

While its rivals strive to deliver sophisticated high-definition graphics on powerful, high-speed machines, Nintendo aims to expand the overall pool of gamers by offering an innovative controller and accessible, easy-to-play games.

Strong demand for the DS and its ground-breaking titles like pet-training game "Nintendogs," in 2005 helped the Japanese game market post growth for the first time in five years.

"By making it quite natural for everyone in a household to use a game console on a daily basis, we are now taking a second step toward the expansion of the game population," Nintendo President Satoru Iwata told a news conference.

Nintendo plans to ship 4 million Wii units by year end, roughly twice Sony's shipment plans for the PS3. Microsoft has said it will have 10 million Xbox 360s to market by year end.

Nintendo said 30 games will be available for the Wii by the end of the year, with about half at launch. Prices for the games will run around $50, $10 less than many Xbox 360 games.

The Wii's one-handed controller looks like a TV remote and uses a motion-detection sensor that allow players to control the game by wielding it like a sword, waving it like a conductor's baton, or swinging it like a baseball bat or a tennis racket.

"This is the first console that really, truly everyone can play," Sam Kennedy, the head of video game Web site 1UP.com, said after the news conference in Japan. "Getting rid of the barrier of the (conventional) controller is a huge deal."

The console comes out of the box bundled with a "Wii Sports" game and a nunchuck.

The Wii announcement was largely expected as Nintendo had said it would launch the console in the final quarter of 2006 at 25,000 yen or less in Japan and $250 or cheaper in the United States. It aims to sell 6 million units by March.

The company said there would be 16 software titles from 10 developers available at the Japan launch including "The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess" by Nintendo itself.

Nintendo expects the latest installment of the blockbuster software to sell for 6,800 yen apiece in Japan. Other launch titles include "Red Steel" by UbiSoft Entertainment SA and games from third-party publishers including Activision Inc. and Electronic Arts Inc.

Nintendo also introduced "Wii Channels," a feature that extends the capabilities of the device to allow users to view photos, watch video, surf the Internet and perform other PC-like activities.

"As a consumer you have to be excited by the $250 price. Relative to the PS3 and 360, it's a bargain," said Mike Hickey, analyst at Janco Partners.

Sony plans to offer a version of its PlayStation 3 console with a 20-gigabyte hard disk drive in Japan on November 11 for 62,790 yen, and in the United States on November 17 for $500.

European gamers, however, will have to wait until March to lay their hands on the PS3, as Sony last week delayed that launch due to inadequate supplies of a key component.

The delay means the Japanese electronics maker will miss the critical holiday shopping season in a key market, which could help Nintendo and Microsoft gain ground.

Atari Announces Neverwinter Nights 2 Limited Edition

Atari, Inc., one of the world's most recognized brands and leading third-party video game publisher, announced the special limited edition version of the highly-anticipated Neverwinter Nights 2. In development by Obsidian Entertainment, Neverwinter Nights 2 is set in the Dungeons &

Dragons Forgotten Realms universe created by Wizards of the Coast, a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc., and will transport players back to the embattled city of Neverwinter. Dungeons & Dragons is under license from the Hasbro Properties Group, the intellectual property development arm of Hasbro. Neverwinter Nights 2 Limited Edition, which includes various collectible items that further transport gamers into the Forgotten Realms universe, is available for pre-order at participating retail stores nationwide.

Neverwinter Nights 2 Limited Edition includes a robust array of detailed collectibles such as:

* A powerful new feat called Blessed of Waukeen will grant a bonus to all saving throws, two special items, access to a unique weapon, and a magical golden aura that surrounds players' characters.
* Detailed cloth map showing in-game locations
* Book of art, depicting characters and scenes from the game
* Two silver antique rings: Good & Evil

"The Neverwinter Nights 2 Limited Edition offers consumers extremely rich and unique collectibles that will further enhance the Neverwinter Nights experience," said Stephen Baer, Senior Product Manager, Atari, Inc. "Atari is pleased to include these specially-crafted items, such as the exclusive book of art, in the limited edition."

The Neverwinter Nights franchise has sold more than two million copies worldwide, is translated into 10 languages, sold in more than 40 countries and features one of the largest and most active fan communities in all of gaming. To date, fans of the franchise, which includes Neverwinter Nights, Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide and Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark, have created nearly 4,000 modifications to the original game using the original, award-winning Aurora Toolset. A more robust toolset will be included with the release of Neverwinter Nights 2.

Neverwinter Nights 2 is scheduled for release in October 2006. More information about Neverwinter Nights 2 can be found at http://www.nwn2.com, which includes user forums, project news, development updates and more.

'LocoRoco' Charms

Reviewers often praise video games for their great graphics, cool sci-fi settings and replay value.

With "LocoRoco," heaps of cuteness, creativity and charm make what could have been another boring platformer into one of the year's most original and irresistible video games for the PlayStation Portable.

The E-rated, $39.99 game has you leading the rescue of the hopelessly happy LocoRocos from a gang of evil aliens called the Moja Corps.

LocoRocos are tuneful, tiny blobs in various colors that grow into mega blobs as they gobble up red berries scattered around the world.

Ending each level with as many LocoRocos as possible, though, is really just an excuse to experience the game's fabulously simple controls.

Only two buttons (the L and R shoulder buttons) are used to roll and jump

around the whimsical worlds, which range from the squishy insides of chameleons and whales to the slippery slopes of winter wonderlands.

What’s disorienting at first is how the controls actually work.

Instead of moving the LocoRocos, you pivot the angle of the entire world to make them roll, jump and slide in various directions.

It definitely takes some getting used to, and it’s a sensation that still has me bending my neck in odd angles when I play.

The Japanese synth-pop music and childlike mutterings of the LocoRocos lend further whimsy to the game, though the songs got rather repetitive after a few hours.

Beneath all this sugary-sweet happiness, there’s a certain amount of redundancy to be found in the levels as well.

The game isn’t particularly difficult, and there are only so many ways one can roll and jump a collection of singing blobs, after all.

But all that is mitigated by the tremendous creativity and myriad secret tunnels and locales to discover.

LocoRoco is definitely a landmark title for the PSP, the sort of game that makes owning the pricey handheld worth the money.

It’s also one of the few titles I felt compelled to show my non-gamer friends and say, "See? There’s a lot more to video games than just dragons and gun battles."

Three stars out of four.

Newcomers Can Embrace ’Sequels’

The video-game industry’s dependence on sequels is widely regarded as a sign of creative stagnation. An awful lot of them seem born of desperation - was anyone crying out for "State of Emergency 2"? Then again, when a truly great original like "God of War" emerges, fans start clamoring for a follow-up almost immediately.

Fans of role-playing games seem particularly hungry for new adventures in the worlds they’ve fallen in love with. Oddly, though, most RPG "sequels" aren’t really sequels - "Final Fantasy VIII" and "Final Fantasy IX" may share some characters and gameplay elements, but the stories have nothing to do with each other.

That makes it easy for newcomers to join in. Don’t let those Roman numerals scare you - jump in now and you can catch up with the earlier games later.

*"Xenosaga Episode III: Also Sprach Zarathustra" (Namco Bandai, for the PlayStation 2, $39.99): Tetsuya Takahashi’s "Xeno" epic began in 1998 with "Xenogears," a wildly ambitious role-playing game that climaxed with nothing less than the death of God. The "Xenosaga" trilogy is no less ambitious, tackling religion, philosophy, psychology and quantum mechanics while questioning the very nature of what it means to be human. (The subtitles of all three "Xenosaga" games are borrowed from Friedrich

Nietzsche books.)

The lead character is a scientist named Shion Uzuki who has developed a battle android named KOS-MOS. As "Episode III" begins, Shion has left her employer after discovering its connection to the Gnosis, monsters from another dimension that are bent on destroying humanity. The plot revolves around her efforts to stop the Gnosis threat, but along the way Shion and her crew are warped backward in time to discover the roles her parents played in the crisis. "Xenosaga" is heady stuff, involving hundreds of characters and a dozen or so intersecting stories, but players who missed the first two episodes should be able to catch up.

"Episode III" does an excellent job of wrapping up the series, connecting the plot threads launched in "Episode I" and avoiding the lulls that marred "Episode II." Plus, it’s really fun, mixing exciting battles with moving, beautifully animated cut scenes. Four stars out of four.

*"Disgaea 2: Cursed Memories" (NIS America, for the PlayStation 2, $49.99): The original "Disgaea," from 2004, was a much more lighthearted affair, telling the story of a demon’s efforts to reclaim his underworld throne. In "Disgaea 2," a kid named Adell is the only human left in a world where everyone else has been turned into monsters. His family inadvertently summons Rozalyn, the snooty daughter of the evil overlord Zenon, so she joins Adell in his mission to dispel the curse. Along the way you’re invited to summon support troops from the usual assortment of RPG types, from fighters and ninjas to magicians and thieves.

Like its predecessor, "Disgaea 2" is an uncommonly challenging strategy game, requiring precise deployment of your team to conquer each of its hundreds of levels. And it’s enlivened by the comical bickering between the two main characters, as well as a lively assortment of off-kilter villains. (Beware the exploding penguins.) The graphics aren’t exactly state-of-the-art, but who cares when a game is this involving? Three-and-a-half stars.

*"Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII" (Square Enix, for the PlayStation 2, $49.99): Vincent Valentine, a supporting character in the 1997 classic "Final Fantasy VII," stars in "Dirge of Cerberus." The sequel takes place three years later, with Vincent trying to stop a mysterious army that has emerged from the wreckage created in the previous game. "Dirge" is a fairly straightforward shoot-’em-up from a company that doesn’t have much experience in the genre, and it’s not as compelling as most titles in Square Enix’s signature series. Fans who are dying to learn more about Vincent’s mysterious past will enjoy it, but RPG aficionados are advised to wait for "Final Fantasy XII" in October - or play "Xenosaga III" now. Two-and-a-half stars.

"Xenosaga III: Also Sprach Zarathustra": http://xenosaga3.namco.com

"Disgaea 2: Cursed Memories": http://www.nisamerica.com/games/d2

"Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII": http://na.square-enix.com/dcff7

Console Launch Blunders

No matter how hard you try, you’re probably never going to have a perfect date, job interview, or hamburger. For all we know, you may turn out to be

an awful parent. Yup, life is full of imperfection, especially when it comes to console launches. Just about every company has been unable to curb shortages, defective hardware, and 100% pure stupidity. So join us as we look back on these erroneous blunders.

Panasonic 3DO - Launched in the U.S. during May 1993

Panasonic's 32-bit system failed for a plethora of reasons, mostly because no one needed it. The early to mid nineties saw several companies flood the market with consoles that, despite lots of hype, failed to knock Nintendo and even Sega from their respective perches. In the 3DO's case, its steep $699 price tag combined with its lackluster launch titles left a bad taste in everyone's mouth.

Sega Saturn - Launched in the U.S. on May 11, 1995

The disappointing 32X launch notwithstanding, Sega still had a nice chunk of the console pie and a devoted fan base. That alone should have been enough to thwart upstart Sony's plans for world domination. But Sega just wasn't content to meet its opponent on an even playing field. Eager to get a jump on the unproven PlayStation, the company shocked the world with the surprise launch of the Saturn several months before its scheduled fall debut. Early adopters flocked to stores to get their hands on the 32-bit system, but there were two problems that got things off to a rocky start. First, and foremost, the system was released way too early. Third parties were caught flat footed and Sega rushed its first party titles. The result was a very shaky launch that was plagued by less than stellar versions of Virtua Fighter and Daytona USA.

The second problem was the price. The Saturn debuted with an MSRP of $399.99, a full $100 more than the PSOne. It also didn't help that the system wasn't easy to program for. Its 2D capabilities were far superior to those in Sony's machine, but the buying public was far more interested in 3D. The Saturn went on to have a decent life and played host to some true classics, but it never recovered from its horrible beginning.

Sega Dreamcast - Launched in the U.S. on September 9, 1999

Despite being burned by the Saturn and 32X, fans still came out to support Sega's Dreamcast and for good reason. The world's first 128-bit system was not only the recipient of a very stylish ad campaign, but also had plenty of quality launch titles. Games like Sonic Adventure, Soul Calibur, and NFL 2K were not only enjoyable at the time, but their visuals easily trumped anything on the PSOne and the Nintendo 64. The launch was a huge success, but once again, Sega couldn't escape trouble. There were the usual hardware defects and some consumers were pissed that the company didn't have a light gun available on day one for The House of the Dead 2, but the real problem came from games that didn't work. An embarrassing amount of defective games such as Hydro Thunder, Ready 2 Rumble Boxing, and Mortal Kombat Gold flooded store shelves, which in turn led to hundreds of unhappy consumers (all of whom should never have purchased MK Gold in the first place). There were lots of returns, but the issue was eventually solved with replacement copies that had the words Hot! New! printed onto the front of the instruction manuals.

Microsoft Xbox 360 - Launched in the U.S. on November 22, 2006

By all accounts, the Xbox 360 had a very successful U.S. launch in that all of the units were purchased, but people were anything but pleased. Microsoft's commitment to a worldwide launch combined with hardware

shortages left many buyers scrambling to stores in the dead of night, hoping to get a ticket or win a raffle. Even worse, and despite Microsoft downplaying the issue, scores of machines were defective, the red ring of despair spelling doom for a toy many people risked life, limb, and sleep to attain. The knife was further driven into America's heart when pictures surfaced of numerous machines collecting dust on shelves in Japan.

Sony PlayStation 2 - Launched in the U.S. on October 26, 2000

Sony rained on North America's parade by announcing in 2000 that it was going to slash the country's PS2 allotment to a mere 500,000 units. The result was pure chaos. Thousands lined up for the machine, only to be turned away. Of course, Sony eventually caught up to the demand, and the system has gone on to become one of the biggest successes in videogame console history.

Sony PlayStation 3 - Bad launch in the making?

At Sony's E3 2006 press conference, the announcement that it was going to hold a worldwide PS3 launch on November 17 as well as manufacture 2,000,000 units was met with harsh criticism. However, the company stood by its claims for months, at least until this week. The publisher announced that, while the system will launch on time in North America and Japan, it won't see the light of day in Europe until March 2007. Furthermore, those 2,000,000 million units have been cut to a mere 500,000 (400,000 for the U.S. and an insulting 100,000 for Japan).

Even with the $499 and $599 price tags, the PlayStation 3 will probably be a very hot console. Early adopters will flock to it like they always do. The real issue is how everyone else feels. With the Xbox 360 growing more popular by the day, the Nintendo Wii gaining traction, and plenty of Sony hatred (most of which is unwarranted) flooding the Internet, the company may find itself on the losing end of this hardware battle.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
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U.S. Likely To Keep Control of Internet Name System

A U.S. State Department official on Wednesday said that the United States should retain control of the Internet domain naming system and not relinquish it at the end of September when the current agreement ends.

"It won't happen on my watch," said Ambassador David Gross of the State Department's Bureau of Economic Affairs.

Gross, who has been U.S. coordinator of international communications and information policy since 2001, spoke at a Washington event along with other advocates of continued U.S. Internet authority.

Some foreign governments and critics have clamored for the U.S. government to give up its control, saying it has too much influence over what is now a global commerce, communications and social engine.

The U.S. government controls the naming system for ".com" and other Web addresses through the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), a not-for-profit company that decides what names can be registered. A Senate committee has scheduled a hearing next week to consider ICANN’s future.

On September 30, the existing memorandum of understanding between ICANN and the Commerce Department will expire but the government has the option to extend its control.

The European Commission was highly critical of what it called "political interference" by U.S. officials last May in rejecting a proposed ".xxx" Internet domain for pornography Web sites - which supporters said would help confine and filter such sites.

Through ICANN, the U.S. government maintains effective control over how top-level domains are administered, including those specific to countries such as ".cn" for China.

The U.S. authority over the Internet domain name system is controlled by the Commerce Department.

At a July public hearing, John Kneuer, the Commerce Department’s acting assistant secretary for communications and information, heard widespread concern over whether ICANN was ready to operate independently, but declined to state the department’s intentions.

"I don’t think the U.S. government will relinquish control of ICANN if there is a risk that the process could get subsumed by a UN-type organization," said David McGuire, spokesman for the Center for Democracy & Technology, a Washington policy group.

Yahoo Mail Gets Makeover

Yahoo mail is getting a face-lift. The Web portal company says it’s made available a new beta version of its online e-mail service Yahoo Mail.

Yahoo says the new iteration of its free e-mail service boasts more desktop application-like features, such as drag-and-drop organization. It also offers an integrated calendar and maps, message preview, an integrated RSS reader and new search capabilities, among other features.

The beta version works on Internet Explorer browsers on Windows computers, and on Firefox browsers on both Windows and Mac computers.

When users sign in or create a new account, they will have the option to try the new interface, and switch between old and new.

Schwarzenegger Computer May Have Been Hacked

California police are probing if computer hackers illegally downloaded a private taped conversation of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger from state computers, a spokesman said Monday.

In the remarks, California's celebrity governor spoke of African Americans and Latinos, including a Hispanic state lawmaker, as having "hot" blood, or being passionate.

The comments were published last week by the Los Angeles Times.

Democrats rebuked Schwarzenegger, a Republican who is seeking re-election in November. State Treasurer Phil Angelides, the Democratic candidate for governor, called the comments offensive and embarrassing for the increasingly Hispanic state.

Computer hacking, not a leak within Schwarzenegger's office, is suspected. "We can confirm that we are looking into the security of the governor's office computer system," said Fran Clader, a spokeswoman with the California Highway Patrol, the agency in charge of the investigation.

Schwarzenegger has apologized for the comments, taped during a meeting with aides. Police are probing their release because they were stored on digital files in state computers with only a few people authorized to access them.

Reporters at the The Los Angeles Times have not said how they acquired the taped remarks, part of a six-minute recording of Schwarzenegger and members of his inner circle.

Political consultants from both parties said Schwarzenegger may have been the target of computer hackers, who stumbled across material that proved embarrassing to the Hollywood and body-building icon.

"This is the technological equivalent of what the Watergate burglars did in 1972," said Republican consultant Dan Schnur.

'Second Life' Hit by Data Breach

Online fantasy game site "Second Life" has suffered a security breach in which the data of 650,000 users may have been exposed, including real names, addresses and billing information.

In a letter sent to its members, the game's maker, Linden Lab, noted that its customer database had been compromised. A security alert on the game's site noted that encrypted payment information and passwords were potentially exposed, and that users should change their passwords. An investigation is still ongoing.

"While we realize this is an inconvenience for residents, we believe it's the safest course of action," noted Linden Lab chief technology officer Cory Ondrejka in the alert.

"Second Life" is a Web-based fantasy game world where animated characters, called avatars, can buy and sell imaginary property, build houses and businesses, and interact with other players.

Up until this point, data privacy and security in games have not been much of an issue, said Forrester Research analyst Paul Jackson.

Even with online games, the most information that a hacker could obtain might be a username and password. But as people spend more time in immersive games like "Second Life" or "World of Warcraft," the situation is changing.

"These games require more private information, like credit card numbers and associated billing addresses," said Jackson. "Also, consumers lovingly craft their avatars or virtual homes for hours and hours, so they feel like they have more to lose."

As the games become more popular ("World of Warcraft" has millions of subscribers worldwide), it is likely that they will become more attractive to identity thieves, Jackson noted.

Especially compelling for attackers may be the less-than-bulletproof security measures at many sites. Since online game makers have not had to deal with intrusion prevention in the past, Jackson believes they may be more vulnerable than other types of companies.

"Hackers used to target banks and e-commerce operations, but now the security at these sites is almost watertight," he said. "So they’re turning their attention to the game market."

Companies like Linden Lab or Blizzard Entertainment, as well as smaller companies developing online games, are likely to have a fresh focus on security after this incident, Jackson added, and come up with sophisticated counter-measures.

Court Halts Alleged Web Site Billing Scheme

A U.S. district court has ordered a halt to an operation that allegedly added unauthorized charges to the phone bills of small businesses and nonprofit groups for Web sites services that, in many cases, they didn’t know they had and didn’t request, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission said.

Judge Kenneth Hoyt of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas has approved a temporary restraining order halting the activity and freezing the assets of a group of businesses and individuals, the FTC announced Thursday.

The FTC’s original complaint named defendants WebSource Media, BizSitePro, Eversites, Telsource Solutions, Telsource International, Marc R. Smith, Kathleen A. Smalley, Keith Hendrick, Steven Kennedy, John O. Ring, and James E. McCubbin Jr. The agency filed an amended complaint later, adding defendant WebSource Media LP, a successor to WebSource Media LLC.

The defendants illegally billed thousands of customers, according to the FTC.

The operation was a maze of interrelated companies directed by the people named as defendants, the FTC said. The operation used telemarketers to make cold calls to small businesses and nonprofits, and offered a "free" 15-day trial of a Web site design. The customers were told there was no charge or obligation and that the Web site would be cancelled automatically if it was not approved by them.

Whether the customers agreed or not to be billed after the trial, their phone bills were often charged. When consumers called to dispute the charges, the operators told them they had "verification recordings" of an employee authorizing the charges.

The FTC said the operation is typical of fraudulent Web cramming operations - by using sales pitches to employees who frequently lack authority to make commitments for their employers and failing to effectively notify consumers that a Web site has been set up. The operators repeatedly changed the names of their companies to avoid detection by telephone companies they rely on to bill consumers and to evade scrutiny from law enforcers, the FTC said.

Software Pirate Gets 7 Years in Prison

A California man has been sentenced to more than seven years in prison and ordered to pay $5.4 million in restitution for selling pirated software online.

Nathan Peterson, 27, pleaded guilty in the District Court in Alexandria, Virginia, in 2005 to two charges of criminal copyright infringement, admitting that he had sold pirated software from Microsoft, Adobe, and Symantec through his Web site, iBackups.net.

Peterson had started selling the programs in 2003, and according to federal authorities, had made more than $5.4 million from the sales. The retail value of the software was close to $20 million, authorities noted.

In addition to serving his prison sentence and paying damages, Peterson has also been ordered to return goods purchased with the proceeds from the operation, including several homes, a boat, and six luxury cars.

The sentence, handed down by U.S. District Court Judge T.S. Ellis III, is the longest ever handed down for software piracy.

Officials have called iBackups.net one of the largest software piracy sites based out of the United States, according to news reports.

Last month, the same judge sentenced a Florida man, Danny Ferrer, to six years in prison for selling pirated software. In that case, Ferrer also pleaded guilty to copyright charges and will be paying more than $4.1 million in restitution to software makers like Adobe, Autodesk, and Macromedia.

Much like Peterson, Ferrer used the money to fund an extravagant lifestyle, and the FBI seized a Lamborghini, two Cessna planes, and a helicopter, among other assets.

Whether the sentence imposed on Peterson will be a deterrent to other software pirates would be difficult to gauge, said JupiterResearch analyst Joe Wilcox, but it could raise awareness among consumers in the U.S.

"The problem with piracy in this country is that people buy pirated software without realizing what they’re doing," he said.

Part of the difficulty is that consumers are used to buying products, he added, such a books and CDs that can be shared with friends and family. "But if you buy Windows, it doesn’t belong to you, it’s Microsoft’s," said

Wilcox. "They're just letting you use it."

But the greater problem is that there are many ways consumers can be fooled, he added. Pricing that is far below the manufacturer's price can be a tip-off, but many people think they are getting a bargain, not a pirated program.

"Prison sentences like the one just handed down might not affect pirates, because there's so much money to be made and so little prosecution," Wilcox said. "But it could make consumers more aware. And if nobody's buying the stuff, pirates will be impacted by that."

Australian Link To Two Billion Spam Emails Probed

Australian authorities are investigating a man accused of sending out more than two billion spam emails - most of them touting Viagra.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) said it had searched a home after a tip-off from Dutch authorities.

"Preliminary analysis of the email messages contained in the spam campaign has identified that over two billion emails were sent," acting authority chair Lyn Maddock said.

"Analysis to date has identified that the messages in the spam campaign primarily promoted Viagra products," she said.

Bruce Matthews, manager of ACMA's anti-spam team, said the regulator was working with Dutch telecommunications authority OPTA, who had brought the case to the attention of Australian authorities.

Matthews said he could not comment further as investigations were still underway and would take some months.

OPTA's Danyel Molenaar said a raid on a small Dutch Internet service provider had revealed that an Australian was responsible for the flood of emails, the Australian Associated Press news agency reported Wednesday.

Molenaar said the man rented 35 servers from the Internet service provider to send spam out for at least a year.

"This operation probably sent out billions and billions of emails," he said.

Although the emails appeared to have been sent from overseas, it was an offence under Australian law for an Australian to be involved, ACMA said.

The Australian authority said it was still analysing the information obtained from its raid, and had yet to determine whether there was an Australian link.

Fines for breaching Australia's Spam Act 2003 range up to a million dollars (750,000 US) a day for repeat corporate offenders, the authority said.

Authors of Zotob Worm Jailed

Two Moroccan men have been jailed for releasing the Zotob computer worm, which wreaked havoc on an estimated 250,000 Windows PCs last year.

Farid Essebar, 19, of Morocco was sentenced to two years in prison on Tuesday by a Moroccan court, according to a report by Agence France-Presse. An accomplice, Achraf Bahloul, also of Morocco, received a one-year sentence, the report said.

A third man, 22 year-old Atilla Ekici, of Turkey has been charged with financing the attack, which shut down PCs in a number of major corporations in mid-August 2005.

The worm primarily affected Windows 2000 systems, taking advantage of a bug in the operating system's Plug and Play service that had been patched by Microsoft just days before the outbreak.

Though it did not infect as many computers as more widespread worms such as Sasser or MyDoom, Zotob did take out systems at media outlets, including CNN, prompting widespread publicity.

Ekici and Essebar, known also by their hacker names of "Coder" and "Diabl0," respectively, were arrested just 12 days after the release of Zotob, but authorities had also been investigating 16 other individuals in connection with a credit card theft ring that may have been linked to the worms.

It is not unusual for hackers to create networks of compromised computers, like the one created by the Zotob worm, for identity theft, said Graham Cluley, a senior technology consultant with antivirus vendor Sophos.

Webloyalty, Fandango Named In Coupon Lawsuit

Online marketing company Webloyalty.com Inc. and online movie ticket seller Fandango Inc. were named in a lawsuit on Monday that accuses them of participating in a scheme where customers' credit cards are billed monthly fees without their knowledge.

The lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Massachusetts, said when customers bought from one of Webloyalty's partners such as Fandango and clicked on a pop-up window offering a $10 coupon on their next purchase, their credit card information was automatically transferred to Webloyalty and they were unwittingly enrolled in its "Reservation Rewards," program.

Once enrolled in Webloyalty's rewards program that promises dining movie ticket and shopping discounts, consumers' credit cards are billed up to $10 each month. The lawsuit is seeking class-action status and unspecified damages.

"Hundreds, if not thousands, of consumers have complained to Webloyalty and local, state and federal consumer protection agencies about the deceptive nature of its sales of its "Reservation Rewards" discount club product and its unauthorized access to their credit card information," the complaint said.

The plaintiff named in the lawsuit, Joe Kuefler, bought movie tickets from

Fandango and was unknowingly enrolled in Webloyalty’s rewards program.

The lawsuit also claims that the two companies violated consumers’ privacy rights by disclosing and using their credit card information.

Representatives for Webloyalty and Fandango were not immediately available for comment.

HP Chair: Board Members Want Her To Stay

Hewlett-Packard Co. Chairwoman Patricia Dunn said Friday that several of her fellow board members want her to remain on the job despite a criminal investigation into her efforts to plug a media leak.

Dunn’s crusade spawned a ruse to obtain the personal phone records of company directors and at least nine reporters. It put HP’s board at the center of an imbroglio that threatens to distract the Palo Alto-based company as it tries to build on a recent run of success in the personal computer and other high-tech markets.

"I serve at the pleasure of the board," Dunn told The Associated Press in an interview. "I totally trust their judgment. If they think it would be better for me to step aside, I would do that. But a number of directors have urged me to hang in there."

Incensed by several media stories that quoted unnamed people about information shared during HP board meetings, Dunn authorized an investigation earlier this year to determine if any of the company’s directors were talking out of turn.

The inquiry convinced HP that George Keyworth II had been providing reporters with confidential company information. The company is punishing him by preventing him from running for re-election to the board.

In Friday’s interview, Dunn branded the leaks as an "egregious breach" of HP’s standards and emphasized the investigation was conducted with the full backing of the board. "This was not my spy campaign on our board."

As part of their surveillance, the company’s investigators posed as HP directors and at least nine reporters to obtain personal phone records. As part of the masquerade, the investigators used the Social Security numbers of the people involved to dupe the phone companies into turning over the records.

Although a frequent tactic, the trickery - known as "pretexting" - tests the bounds of California law. California Attorney General Bill Lockyer is already convinced HP’s investigation broke state law, but is still digging to determine the breadth of the violations.

Dunn said she had no clue investigators would resort to pretexting, saying she didn’t even know what the word meant until June or July.

The invasion of privacy so infuriated one HP director, longtime Silicon Valley venture capitalist Tom Perkins, that he resigned from the board in May and triggered a chain of events that finally forced HP to publicly disclose its role in the pretexting earlier this week.

On Thursday, Lockyer said HP's clandestine investigation violated two California laws related to identity theft and illegal access to computer records. However, he said he had not decided whether the company or anyone acting on its behalf will face civil or criminal charges.

"The question was, was a crime committed? The answer is yes. Does that mean charges will result? Well, we haven't completed the investigation so we're not yet certain as to who committed the crime," Lockyer told the AP in a phone interview.

"It's likely if evidence continues to come in the way it has that there will be a prosecution," he said. "But we're not ready to go file a complaint. We're still investigating."

Company spokesman Ryan Donovan said HP had given Lockyer's office the list of reporters whose personal information was compromised and the journalists themselves have since been notified.

The nine include Pui-Wing Tam and George Anders of The Wall Street Journal, Dawn Kawamoto and Tom Krazit of CNET Networks Inc.'s News.com and John Markoff of The New York Times, those news organizations disclosed.

Experts in privacy and telecommunications law say HP officials or the private investigators HP hired could face criminal charges. The company could also be liable for civil crimes and be subject to fines.

Lockyer said HP's antics violated directors' and journalists' right to privacy, which is guaranteed in California's Constitution. He emphasized that no one involved in the investigation is above the law.

"The crime seems to have been committed by the data broker, but that leads to the question of who knew what and when," Lockyer said. "How many others were part of the illegal activity - we don't know the answer to that yet."

People involved in the HP investigation may have also violated a California Civil Code banning a corporation's communication of employee Social Security numbers to the public.

One of HP's private investigators obtained the last four digits of the Social Security number of Perkins. The investigator called AT&T and impersonated Perkins, asking AT&T to send a record of phone calls to and from his house in December 2005 and January 2006 to a free, Web-based e-mail account.

HP Chairman to Step Down Amid Scandal

Patricia Dunn, Hewlett-Packard's embattled chairman, will be relieved of those duties after the board's January 18, 2007, meeting, but will continue as a director.

The announcement came this morning, following meetings of the board over the weekend and Monday. Mark Hurd, HP's chief executive officer and president will also take on the chairman's job. Richard Hackborn, who has been on the board since 1992, has been chosen as the lead independent director as of January.

Dunn has been under intense pressure to step down as chairman after it came

to light last week that the board of directors carried out an investigation to determine who among the board leaked confidential information to journalists. The board admitted in a filing with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) that the internal probe involved "pretexting," where employees of an investigative firm hired by the company pretended to be reporters to gain access to their telephone records.

Federal authorities, including the U.S. Department of Justice and a congressional committee, are questioning the board's conduct in the probe and the California attorney general has said that charges are likely to be filed.

"The recent events that have taken place follow an important investigation that was required after the board sought to resolve the persistent disclosure of confidential information from within its ranks. These leaks had the potential to affect not only the stock price of HP but also that of other publicly traded companies," Dunn said in a written statement released by HP.

"Unfortunately, the investigation, which was conducted by third parties, included certain inappropriate techniques. These went beyond what we understood them to be, and I apologize that they were employed."

In a statement, Hurd pledged to take action to make sure that such "inappropriate investigative techniques" do not happen again. "They have no place in HP," she said in the statement.

Microsoft Warns of "Critical" Security Flaw

Microsoft Corp. on Tuesday released three security patches to fix holes in its Windows and Office software and warned one of the vulnerabilities was "critical" because it could allow an attacker to take over a user's computer.

The world's biggest software maker said the single flaw rated at critical - the highest level - related to Microsoft Publisher, which is included with some editions of Office. The other vulnerabilities were ranked at the next highest levels of "important" and "moderate" and affected its Windows software.

"Attackers see home users as the weakest link in the security chain and are increasingly targeting this group in an effort to profit," Oliver Friedrichs, an expert at security software maker Symantec Corp.

Microsoft, whose Windows operating system runs on 90 percent of the world's computers, issued the patches as part of its monthly security bulletin.

The company defines a flaw as "critical" when the vulnerability could allow a damaging Internet worm to replicate without the user doing anything to the machine.

The company has been working for more than three years to improve the security and reliability of its software as more and more malicious software target weaknesses in Windows and other Microsoft software.

The latest patches can be downloaded at www.microsoft.com/security.

AOL To Offer Insurance To Subscribers

Free insurance coverage for identity theft and computer damage is among the premium security offerings AOL is making available to its dwindling base of paying subscribers.

The move, which AOL said it would announce to its members Tuesday, follows last month's decision to give away AOL.com e-mail accounts, software and other features once reserved for paying subscribers and remove key reasons for millions of customers to keep paid accounts.

The insurance, offered through American International Group Inc., pledges up to $10,000 to help restore users' identity and credit regardless of how their Social Security number, bank account or other personal information got compromised. The policy covers costs for refiling rejected loan applications, legal fees, credit reports and up to $2,000 in lost wages.

A separate AIG policy covers up to $1,000 to repair or replace computers that suffer physical damage.

But don't spill coffee quite yet: The replacement cost is limited to the computer's current value, not its purchase price. And yesterday's models are always worth less today.

The insurance is limited to subscribers under the $26-a-month unlimited access and $10-a-month broadband plans. It does not apply to the $10 monthly plan with unlimited access but fewer features than the full plan. And New York state residents are ineligible because of state laws, AOL spokesman Andrew Weinstein said.

The policies require no deductible, but are secondary to other coverage, meaning a user's homeowner's or renter's insurance pays first. To activate the insurance, users must first use the firewall and computer checkup tools that AOL is introducing at no extra charge to paying subscribers Tuesday.

Over the past two years, AOL has been giving away more and more of its services to boost traffic to its ad-supported Web sites and prevent defection to comparable, no-cost offerings from rivals.

At the same time, the Dulles, Va.-based online unit of Time Warner Inc. has faced competition from low-cost service providers like United Online Inc. for the services for which AOL can keep charging - dial-up access.

The premium security offerings are an attempt to provide more value for the full-price plans.

Besides insurance, subscribers of eligible plans get software for optimizing computers and for monitoring attempts by programs to send out credit card, bank account and Social Security numbers. Also included is a tool for wiping a storage disk clean so that deleted files can't be recovered should a user donate or resell a computer.

Subscribers of the $26 plan also get 50 gigabytes of free online storage, 10 times the amount AOL gives away free to others.

AOL will also sell separately a Total Care product that includes automated backup services beyond what's offered with the free online storage. The

product is still undergoing a "beta" test, and prices have not been announced.

Total Care is comparable to the Windows Live OneCare service that Microsoft Corp. began offering in May for $50 a year to cover up to three computers. Both offer security software, backup services and computer utilities.

AOL, meanwhile, began giving away parental-control services on Monday, in line with its pledge last month when the company announced its strategy to make even more services free in light of continued declines in subscriptions - to 17.7 million in the United States as of June 30, a 34 percent drop from its peak in September 2002.

The services block access to Web sites AOL or parents deem inappropriate for minors, limit when and how long kids stay online through a software timer and produce reports detailing their children's Internet activities.

Microsoft, which offers parental controls to paying customers of MSN, also is testing a free tool, Windows Live OneCare Family Safety.

Both AOL and Microsoft already make other security programs such as personal firewalls available free.

McGruff To Bite Cyber Criminals

The "McGruff" character that warned kids to "take a bite out of crime" is now asking today's youth to do the same for online criminals.

In conjunction with Intel, McAfee, Verisign, and others, the National Crime Prevention Council is working with nonprofit marketing group The CMO Council to promote a "mass immunization" of PCs, the establishment of a educational web site, and the creation of a cadre of 20,000 "Junior CyberGuards" to help defeat online predators and other criminals.

According to Jennifer Heisler, who has managed the McGruff Network, the canine law enforcement character will be used to highlight the dangers of viruses, online predators, phishing attempts, and other combinations of automated attacks and criminal online behaviors. The organization claims that 70 percent of all children online under age 14 are contacted by an online predator.

"We looked at it to bring the prevention angle to the messaging," Heisler said. "There's a lot of stuff out there, with online threats, as well as physical threats. We wanted to focus on the prevention side, rather than cleaning up afterwards." She described the program as "taking McGruff to the next level".

In October, consumers will be called to action to secure their PCs, in conjunction with security software vendor McAfee. Security software will be offered at discounts to those participating in the program, although Don Scott, the chief operating officer of the CMO, said the exact discounts have yet to be determined. McAfee's SiteAdvisor will be available for free, he said.

The campaign is already being funneled through ByteCrime.org, an educational website that is already up in beta form. The site is designed to be a "robust information center" about threats in the digital world,

Scott said.

Finally, 20,000 kids will be anointed "Junior CyberGuards," training their family and friends in how to secure their PCs, and walking them through the steps to do so. No incentives are currently planned for the volunteers, although that may change, Scott said.

Intel is providing support for the initiative through the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, as well as reaching out to the Latino population. USA Today and CNET are contributing print and online ads, respectively. The program is still seeking more sponsors, Scott said.

Password-Plagued Workers Burden Help Desks

The volume of required business passwords overwhelms users and hinders IT security efforts, according to a study released Sept. 12 by RSA Security, based in Bedford, Mass.

One quarter of the 1,300 responding business professionals reported password-related security breaches. The study asserts that the burden of multiple passwords poses significant security risks and encourages user behavior that endangers compliance initiatives.

The surveyed users said they felt swamped by the number of passwords necessary to access business applications and Web sites and portals, in some cases leading to precarious behaviors.

Eighteen percent of respondents managed more than 15 passwords, but only 5 percent said they felt they could easily remember that many; 36 percent managed between six and 15 passwords. The majority, 82 percent, expressed frustration with the task of managing passwords at work.

Only 23 percent of U.S. respondents were required to change their passwords regularly, the lowest number among three regions. Thirty-nine percent in the Asia-Pacific region and 34 percent in Europe were required to change their passwords monthly.

Most users reported strong password policies at their organizations, with 70 percent requiring passwords between eight and 14 characters using a combination of letters and symbols. 48 percent said their companies did not allow the reuse of old passwords. However, 17 percent said their companies had no password requirements.

57 percent of respondents said the desire of their companies to avoid user frustration prevents the organization from requiring frequent password changes or strong password policies.

Two-thirds reported seeing employees keep paper password records at work, but only 13 percent of those surveyed admitted doing so. Fifty-eight percent were aware of employees keeping electronic password records (such as in a spreadsheet), though only 24 percent of workers said they used these themselves. Fifty percent said they knew of employees tracking passwords in a PDA or handheld device and 40 percent had seen the same done using Post-It notes or scraps of paper affixed to workstations.

For advice on how to secure your network and applications, as well as the latest security news, visit Ziff Davis Internet’s Security IT Hub.

More than half (56 percent) of respondents said having a "master password" that replaced all other passwords would be "extremely helpful."

Respondents were not unaware of the impact of passwords on security: 26 percent said they knew of a corporate security breach that had occurred due to a compromised password. Regionally, those in the Asia-Pacific region were most aware (35 percent) while those in the United States were the least (14 percent).

Breaches mentioned included former employees accessing business accounts using their passwords, terminated employees guessing a former manager's password to gain remote access and an employee altering a coworker's private human resources file.

The results highlighted the workload burden placed on IT help desks as a result of password-related support requests. Twenty percent said password-related calls constituted between 25 and 50 percent of help desk requests. Larger companies were found to be more burdened by password-related help desk calls than smaller ones.

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